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P 141107Z MAR 08
FM AMCONSUL KOLKATA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1923
INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE
RUEHGO/AMEMBASSY RANGOON 0410
RUEHRC/DEPT OF AGRICULTURE USD FAS WASHINGTON DC
RUCPDO/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHINGTON DC
RUEAUSA/DEPT OF HHS WASHINGTON DC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
RUEIDN/DNI WASHINGTON DC
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 0092
RUEHRN/USMISSION UN ROME PRIORITY 0020
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL KOLKATA 2351

UNCLAS KOLKATA 000093

SIPDIS

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DEPT PLS PASS HHS, CDC AND APHIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [KFLU](#) [EAGR](#) [TBIO](#) [ECON](#) [PGOV](#) [CASC](#) [AMED](#) [SENV](#) [IN](#)

SUBJECT: WEST BENGAL UNABLE TO MEET CULLING TARGETS IN LATEST AI
OUTBREAK

REF: KOLKATA 0084

1. SUMMARY: In West Bengal's latest H5N1 outbreak, cullers managed to cull only half their target of 50,000 birds in one week. Despite a ban in the affected areas, people continue to buy and sell poultry. GOWB officials are unsure of how to manage the situation and efforts at containing poultry movement have been ineffective. END SUMMARY.

2. Beginning March 10, Rapid Response Teams (RRTs) from GOWB's Animal Resources Department (ARD) began culling poultry in Jiaganj and Raghunathganj II administrative blocks of Murshidabad district. Forty-one villages in these two blocks reported the presence of H5N1 virus in backyard poultry (reftel). Although the administration set a culling target of 50,000 birds, it culled only 27,077 birds through March 13. Per government guidelines, there is a ban on trade and movement of poultry within a 3-mile radius of the infected areas. No restrictions are in place in the rest of West Bengal. No reports of poultry mortality have come from adjoining states of Assam, Jharkhand and Bihar. No human cases have been reported.

3. GOWB officials admitted that the culling operation was proving more difficult than anticipated, as people were either resisting or avoiding the culling. ARD minister Anisur Rahman told the press that people sold nearly 20,000 birds out of the affected areas, when they heard that trade and movement of poultry would be banned in the two Murshidabad blocks. The GOWB does not have a mechanism to trace these birds. ARD department officials expressed their concern about a continuing lack of awareness among villagers about the disease and its possible impact on human health. ARD officials are also worried that the ensuing monsoon season rains could cause the spread of the virus. Minister Rahman has hinted at the possibility of the GOWB discouraging backyard poultry farming, and to bring these operations into the organized poultry sector farming. Such policy changes would have significant impact on rural livelihoods and incomes and would be unlikely before the rural elections in May.

4. Regarding reports of poultry deaths in neighboring Birbhum district (reftel), Birbhum ARD officials continue to say that birds that died at Metela, Jhatpara and Goondara villages had no clinical symptoms of H5N1 infection, attributing the deaths to tape worm found in most of the samples sent for a post mortem examination.

¶5. COMMENT: The brisk sale of chickens from the AI-affected blocks indicates a continued lack of awareness about AI risks among the general populace. Unless greater awareness raising efforts are made and better financial incentives are offered for culled chicken, control and destruction of possibly AI-affected poultry will be difficult.

JARDINE